

**STATEMENT OF DURAND JONES, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE,
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS,
RECREATION, AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE,
CONCERNING H. R. 2628, TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO STUDY
THE SUITABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING THE MUSCLE SHOALS
NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA IN ALABAMA**

FEBRUARY 7, 2002

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 2628. This bill would direct the Secretary of the Interior to study the suitability and feasibility of establishing the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area in Alabama.

The Department supports this bill, but we did not request additional funding for this study in Fiscal Year 2003. We believe that any funding requested should be directed towards completing previously authorized studies. Presently, there are 40 studies pending, of which we hope to transmit 15 to Congress by the end of 2002. We have concerns about adding new funding requirements for new park units, national trails, wild and scenic rivers or heritage areas at the same time that we are trying to work down the deferred maintenance backlog. To estimate these potential new funding requirements, the Administration will identify in each study all of the costs to establish, operate and maintain the proposed site.

Muscle Shoals is the name of a section of the Tennessee River in northwestern Alabama that was a major navigation hazard due to the shoals and other obstructions in that part of the river. Repeated governmental efforts in the 1800's to make that part of the river safe for navigation by building canals and locks were unsuccessful. However, Muscle Shoals was selected by President Woodrow Wilson as the site for a dam for electric power and two nitrate production plants as a national defense measure during World War I, which was possibly the nation's largest public work of its time. The completion of the dam in 1925, named for President Wilson, created a lake over the shoals and thus solved the river's navigation problems. A major debate over public versus private ownership of the Wilson Dam and the nitrate facilities made Muscle Shoals a focus of national attention during the 1920's and 1930's. The issue was resolved when the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) was established in 1933 and the facilities were transferred to that entity. For that reason, Muscle Shoals is generally considered the birthplace of the TVA.

With the shoals submerged today, the name Muscle Shoals is used to refer to the area that includes Lauderdale, Colbert, Franklin, and Lawrence counties in Alabama, within which lie the cities of Florence, Sheffield, Tuscumbia, and Muscle Shoals City. Nearby areas in northeastern Mississippi and southwestern Tennessee are considered part of the Muscle Shoals region. In addition to the Wilson Dam, which was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1966, the area has many notable historic and cultural resources including the home of Helen Keller, Frank Lloyd Wright's Rosenbaum House, and a number of historic Victorian and Arts and Crafts residences. Florence hosts an annual music festival named for blues musician W.C. Handy, who resided there, and the region is home to several other musicians who have made significant contributions to contemporary American music.

In addition, there are Native American and Civil War resources in the area, some of which are managed by

the National Park Service. The Natchez Trace Parkway, following the historic route of the Trace, runs through the region. Part of the 1838 Trail of Tears is located in the area. The Corinth, Mississippi unit of Shiloh National Military Park is located in the vicinity.

H.R. 2628 authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study to determine whether the Muscle Shoals region is suitable and feasible to designate as a national heritage area. The bill contains the criteria for making this determination that has been used for other national heritage area studies that Congress has authorized in recent years, and it includes the three-year time frame for conducting the study that most bills include. H.R. 2628 provides for the study to be conducted in consultation with State historic preservation officers, State historical societies, and other appropriate organizations. The bill further specifies that the study consider a number of factors including local and state interest and support.

The National Park Service has defined a national heritage area as a place designated by Congress where natural, cultural, historic and scenic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally distinctive landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography. It is not the role of the National Park Service to manage or regulate a national heritage area, but to assist the variety of local partners and landowners that work together to achieve the common goal of protecting and interpreting important places where people live and work.

It is evident that communities and organizations in the Muscle Shoals region value their heritage and open space and are looking for ways to maintain and enhance these qualities. The city of Florence, for example, has implemented a waterfront improvement program that includes an outdoor amphitheater, biking and hiking trails, a marina, public riverside walks, and other public spaces. The city has also constructed a new bridge with intermodal connectors to road and trail systems across the river in Colbert County and through the Tennessee Valley Authority Reservation, which provides linkages to Natchez Trace National Historic Trail and Trail of Tears interpretive sites, Civil War sites, and other cultural resources along the Tennessee River.

A heritage area study conducted by the National Park Service would help determine the level of support that might exist in the study area for heritage area designation and would help identify other protection and preservation options. The study would likely examine existing efforts to enhance cultural, natural, and recreational opportunities, such as those that are underway at Florence, and assess how such efforts might tie in with other resources and values identified in the study area. A critical element of the study would be the evaluation of the integrity of the resources and the nationally distinctive character of the region.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared remarks. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.

####